

# The Social Pirates The Little Monte Carlo

Plot by George Bronson Howard, Novelization by Hugh C. Weir

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"I'm glad to get back, at that," said Mona Hartley to her chum, Mary Burnett.

The two girls were leaning over the rail of a steamer that was being warped into her dock by tugs. They had been having a vacation trip, and, though that was over now, and they faced the necessity of replenishing the store of money, heavily drawn upon for the trip, they looked happy.

"So'm I," said Mary. "I was tired when we went away."

Mona laughed. These two girls, so well dressed, so fashionable in their appearance, had no visible means of support.

They had become embittered some time before by the experience of some close friends who had suffered at the hands of unscrupulous leeches of society, black-mailers and parasites.

They had therefore decided to conduct a campaign against this class of men and make them suffer, especially financially, in what the two girls considered a partial retribution for their misdeeds.

They had pledged themselves to select for their victims only those whose despicable and contemptible actions had already marked them as belonging to the pack of black wolves of society, and in this way the two girls considered that they merely collected the bill of expense due them for conducting this crusade against such individuals, and the while to which they were obliged at times to resort were simply a minor detail in this process of collection.

A few minutes later they were ashore. For some reason they did not secure one of the first flights of taxis, and had to wait while another was summoned. And while they waited they strolled to the end of the pier, to look at the passing river traffic. Suddenly Mary clutched Mona's arm.

"Look at that girl, Mona!" she said. "What do you suppose is the matter with her? I'll swear she is trying to pluck up courage to jump in."

Mona looked and saw a young girl who was so distraught that she was not aware that anyone was watching her. With a quick leap Mona sprang toward her and was not in time to seize her as the girl gathered up her determination and stepped out to drop into the water. Mary was not a moment behind her chum, and together they held her.

"Look here," said Mona, as the girl struggled to free herself. "There's no sense in that! There's no sense in that! There's nothing so bad that it can't be mended."

In a moment the girl stopped struggling, and stared dully at them.

"You don't know," she said. "There's nothing else for me. I'd made up my mind, and now Heaven knows if I'll get up my courage again."

"Perhaps you won't need it," said Mary. "Come on Mona, bring her along. I see a man waiting for us."

The girl went with them unresistingly. In a few minutes they reached the furnished apartment they had taken before they left the city, and in a few minutes more they had the girl's story and her names, Stella Worth.

"You poor kid!" said Mona sympathetically. "In the chorus, were you? And some one introduced you to this Charles Holbrook? He said he'd marry her as soon as he could fix things up with his father? And you were foolish enough to believe him?"

It was a pathetic little story, conventional enough. Stella had been innocent, amorous, in reality. She had believed Holbrook's promises. And then—the awakening. He had tired of her—a curt note had come one day in the mail, telling her that things had developed so that he could not see her again, and she had better make some arrangement for herself.

Her desperate appeals to him had gone unanswered. And now that the mischief was done, there were plenty to warn Stella.

"Why—you—child! I believe you're in love with him still!" said Mary.

"Oh, I am! He'd only marry me!" wailed Stella.

Mona and Mary exchanged pitiful glances. And suddenly it seemed that Mona had an idea.

"You say he's rich, Stella?" she asked.

"Ever and ever so rich!" said Stella.

"Well—don't despair yet," said Mona. "There may be a way to help you. For now you've got to take some money, and remember that we're your friends, and are going to stand by you. You'll promise not to do anything silly—as you were going to when we saw you?"

"I'll promise," said Stella, tearfully. "You're awfully good to me!"

"Look here," said Mary, sharply, after Stella had gone. "We want to do a thing for that poor kid, and you know it! Why did you go and raise her hopes that way?"

"Well—because she had to be cheered up," said Mona. "And I'm not so certain we can't do anything for her anyhow. I don't know yet, but I've got a sort of a plan. Look here!"

She lifted her skirts to her knees and executed a little dance.

"Do you think I could get a job in the chorus?" she asked.

"Anywhere?" said Mary. "But why?"

"I think I want to meet Mr. Charles Holbrook—on his own ground!" said Mona, viciously. "I think luck's coming our way, Mary—that's what I think! I think we'll enjoy collecting a little bill from Mr. Holbrook, just as much as we did our experience with old Reynolds!"

"Oh—oh!" said Mary. "I'm stupid, Mona! I do begin to see now, too! Not how we can do anything for Stella—but how we can punish Mr. Holbrook, anyhow!"

"You'll have to see something," said Mona. "Because I haven't got anything except what some of your racing friends would call a hunch. As usual, you'll have to be the one to work out the details. You try to scare up an idea while I go see about my job. There's a new show opening at the Duchess—that's where Stella was. I imagine it'll be a sort of hangout for chappies like this Holbrook, too."

"Yes. You'll have no trouble getting on. You've even had experience, haven't you? I'd forgotten you used to be in the chorus before."

"Yes, I've had experience," said Mona, rather grimly. "The chorus is all right if you have independent means, as I have now. But it didn't seem to be intended, in my time, for girls who had to live on their salaries! And I didn't like the ways that were suggested of increasing my income!"

So Mona set out. She found that her luck was with her when she reached the theater. At the stage-door a bored young man waved her on, and she made her way to the stage, where applicants for places the chorus of the new show were being examined. A man sat at a table, with a book before him.

"Look all right in short skirts?" he asked. Mona proved to him that she would. He entered her name and address—she gave false ones, naturally. Then her voice was tried, and in five minutes she was engaged and instructed to report for rehearsal next morning.

"And God help those who aren't quick," the producer told them. "We've got to put this show on in two weeks, and that means SOME work!"

Mona knew it, and that means SOME work! Yet she was glad, too, that the public performances would begin so soon. It meant that there would be less time to wait before she could begin the execution of her plan against Charles Holbrook, whom, as yet, she hadn't even seen.

For the next two weeks it was a tired Mona who came home, night after night—morning after morning, rather, since rehearsals often lasted into the small hours. She was not entirely free from annoyance during this period, but her utter weariness at the end of rehearsals protected her a good deal, and she managed to escape with nothing worse than a reputation among the hangers-on of the theater, among whom Holbrook did not appear, of being stuck up—of having too good an opinion of herself and her charms.

At last the time came for the opening performance. Mona's beauty and her real cleverness had earned her a front row position. She was, indeed, one of a group that was made in some of the big concert numbers. This served her purpose very well, and it was certain that she was conspicuous enough to attract Holbrook's attention. She had made Stella show her a photograph of him, and so was able to recognize him, sitting in a stage box on the opening night. She made eyes at him deliberately once or twice, and had the satisfaction of knowing that she had attracted his attention.

It was her alone that first night. But on the second evening he came behind the scenes between the acts, the management being glad to extend that privilege to certain rich men, and was introduced to her. And later he was waiting for her when she emerged from the stage door.

"Hello, bright eyes!" he said. "How about a bite to eat?"

"Oh, no, thanks!" she said. "But if you'd like to walk home with me, I'm rather nervous in the street at night."

He laughed delightedly, and fell into step beside her. There was something new, he thought—a real chorus girl who wasn't hungry all the time.

At a boarding house she stopped.

"I live here," said Mona. "Thanks for seeing me home."

"Can't I come in?"

"Oh, no!" she said, pretending to be shocked. "Not tonight!"

He laughed, well satisfied, as she hurried in. He did not know that she only waited in the vestibule until he was out of sight.

For several nights Mona let Holbrook walk "home" with her, but she declined all his invitations to permit him to enter the house when she did. As she had been certain would be the case, the difficulty he was experiencing proved simply an

added attraction. When he found that she would not drop into his hand, like a ripe apple, he redoubled his efforts to win her.

"Oh, he's getting very enthusiastic!" Mona told Mary. "How about your plan? Have you really got one?"

"I certainly have!" said Mary. "Look here! I've been making a few little purchases."

And she took Mona into their spare room where several packing boxes had been placed. Mona cried out in enthusiastic approval at what they revealed. A roulette wheel—all the other paraphernalia of gambling.

"We can turn this apartment into a perfect model of a gambling house at an hour's notice," said Mary. "I think that's going to be the proper way to hook your little friend."

"Well—he's awfully careful—he doesn't care

for gambling himself," said Mona. "He's told me so."

"You like it, though, don't you?"

"Ah—I see! Yes—I'm crazy about it! Mary—I believe you're a genius!"

"Don't be too sure—there's a wise proverb about not counting your chickens before they're hatched, my dear! I haven't worked out the details at all yet—I thought we'd better act, in a case like this, on the spur of the moment."

"I think so, too. Well—there are a few things we can decide. Suppose you turn up at Curate's on New Year's Eve! I think he may persuade me to have supper there with him that night!"

And, to his delight, Mona did yield to Holbrook's pleading to that extent. She had fore-

seen that he would make a special point of it on that night, the greatest occasion of the whole year for those who flock, like moths, about the white lights of the theatrical district.

"Well—just for this once!" she conceded at last.

"You're a queer kid!" he said. "Sometimes I think you're wise—and then again I'm not sure I'm not all wrong about you."

"I'm wise enough, Charley boy," she told him, meaningly. "Maybe I ought to want a lot more than I've got, but I seem to get along."

"Well, I'm thankful for small favors," he said.

So the beginning of the riotous celebration found them at a table in Curate's. And it was not long before Mary, stunningly dressed, passed their table.

"Hello, Betty!" she said, using Mona's assumed name. "I haven't seen you in an age!"

"My friend, Mr. Holbrook, Miss Dean," said Mona. "Aren't going, are you?"

"This is getting slow," said Mary. "I'm off for some real fun! Little Monte Carlo for mine!"

A spasm of envy distorted Mona's features.

"I wish I could go, too!" she said. "Gee! I don't know how long it is since I had money enough to watch the little ball rolling with some of my money backing it!"

"Come on—be a sport!" said Mary. "Bring your friend along."

"No use—I can't afford it," said Mona.

"Sure you can," said Holbrook. "I'll stake you."

"That's the way to talk!" said Mary. "There you are, Betty! You've got a live one in tow tonight!"

Holbrook hung eagerly on her answer. He was sure that now, by a lucky chance, he had come upon Mona's weakness.

"Well—I don't know," said Mona, doubtfully, but making it seem that she was greatly tempted.

"We'll be along," said Holbrook. "You look for us in about an hour, Miss Dean! I'll guarantee to persuade her!"

"All right—I'll leave her to you," said Mary.

And at last, though reluctantly, Mona consented.

"I'll go and look on," she said. "But I'm not going to let you stake me! I won't be under obligations to you or any other man!"

"Oh, don't talk foolishness!" said he. "I'd be tickled to death to give you a chance to have some fun! You know I'm willing to do anything I can for you at any time you give the word!"

When the hour was up she led him to the apartment she shared with Mary—where had been transformed into "Little Monte Carlo."

Mona herself scarcely knew the apartment. So skillfully had it been transformed into the semblance of one of the cozy and luxurious gambling dens that cater to the patronage of rich and fashionable people; and especially women, that it amazed her. A suave and smiling man came forward to welcome them, and pretended that he knew Mona well, though she had never laid eyes on him before. He was the "proprietor," Mona had to admire Mary's cleverness. Besides the proprietor there were several other supers—a waiter, two or three croupiers and dealers, and a number of players, well dressed people, who paid no attention to the newcomers.

"Awful glad to see you, Betty," said Mary, coming up to them. "But I was sure you'd persuade her, Mr. Holbrook!"

"He didn't—altogether. I'm not going to play," said Mona.

However, it was easier to say that she wouldn't play than to stick to the resolution, good as it was. The sight of the rolling ball, the disappointment of seeing it roll into a number she would have played—It was all too much for Mona! In a few minutes she drew out her purse and risked, one by one, the few quarters that it held. She lost regularly, and at last she turned a disappointed face up to Holbrook.

"There—I've lost all I had!" she said. "Now I'm going home!"

"Don't be silly," he said. He squeezed her hand, and left a couple of bills in it. Take that and play till you've got enough to pay me back!"

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pay—how much is it?" said Holbrook, angrily. Stanley consulted a little pile of Mona's I. O. U's.

"Five thousand, two hundred and ten dollars," he said.

"WHAT?" yelled Holbrook, furiously, and stopped, thunderstruck. He stared at Mona, who was in tears.

"Oh, I was wicked!" she cried. "Charles! I went back after you left me—and lost the rest of the money! I couldn't resist it—it's what gambling does to me! I'm not fit to be trusted when there's a chance for me to gamble!"

"Good Lord! How did you suppose I was going to be able to pay you that much money? You, Stanley—you must think I'm a fool! I won't pay it!"

"I'm sorry," said Stanley. "I'll have to take the matter up with your father, then, Mr. Holbrook. Let's see—Des Moines, Iowa, is where he lives, isn't it?"

Here—hold on!" said Holbrook, greatly excited. He picked up his bank book and did some rapid figuring. Then his eyes fell on a letter, and he called Mona over and showed it to her. This is what she read:

"My dear son—

"Why do you persist in remaining in the city? I shall feel obliged to discontinue your allowance unless you give a better account of expenditures."

"Surely the enclosed should be sufficient for this month."

"Your Father."

"P. S.—Hope you are arranging your marriage as promised."

Now you can see what you've done to me," stormed Holbrook. "A fine mess I'll be in now!"

"I'm dreadfully sorry!" stammered Mona. "I never dreamed it would be so serious, though!"

Holbrook hesitated for a moment. As he took two keys, exactly alike from his pocket.

"Here is the key to a little apartment I have," he said. "I'll give you the address. If I pay this man, will you be there tonight?"

Mona started back. But in a moment she held out her hand for the key. He gave it to her, and with it a card, on which an address was written. He went back to his desk, and tore up the letter, dropping it in the waste basket.

Mona flashed a signal to Stanley, who, as Holbrook sat down to write a check, snatched up the two pieces of the letter and handed them to Mona.

"Thank you," said Stanley, as Holbrook grudgingly gave him the check. "Here are your memoranda."

Holbrook stopped Mona for a moment as she was going out.

"Tonight!" he whispered.

She nodded. And then she went out with Stanley, and they turned to one another with a laugh. It was not long before they had cashed Holbrook's check. Stanley, with his reward for the part he had played so well, went off, entirely satisfied, and Mona with the rest of the money, hurried to Mary, who was delighted.

"And look!" said Mona. "I've got my bank book now, Mary! Look at this letter he got from his father!"

"Does he mean to get married?" asked Mary, after she had pored the letter together and read it.

"Of course not—it was just a trick to get more money," said Mona. "But—"

"Let me think," said Mary. "You're right, Mona—you must bet. There must be some way we can turn this to account."

"I knew you'd be able to think of something, Mary! That was why I got the pieces of the letter!"

It was an eager young man, determined to forget his jolt in the matter of the I. O. U., and to make up for that by his conquest of Mona. He went to the apartment he had taken, and set himself in, and called, as soon as he was inside the door, "Betty!"

An old suit case was there on the floor, and there were evidences that someone had been in the room. Eagerly he tore aside the curtains that hid the other room. It was empty! Safe for a note.

"When you boast about any girl," he said, "be sure you know the girl!"

He went back to his own apartment in a black rage. And there, to increase his anger, he found Stella waiting. Stella Worth, the girl he had cast off! He felt a moment of tenderness at the sight of her, she had trusted him so fully, she was so different from this other girl.

"What do you want?" he snarled.

"Oh, Charles!" she said, pleadingly. "My dear—aren't you going to be fair to me now?"

"Fair to you?" he sneered. "You've got no claim on me!"

"There is a reason," she faltered. "Charles—can't you understand?"

He had enough decency in him to be affected by her resolution, and to realize that she was what he should always have believed her to be, a good girl, but he was not decent enough to be willing to make the only amends that were in his power. Even while he stared at her, however, there was a knock at the door. He answered it and received a note from his father.

"My dear son: Came in on business tonight, and am at this hotel. Am going to bed, so do not call tonight."

"Call tomorrow, and bring your bride to me. Have decided to increase your inheritance if you marry at once."

"Father!"

Holbrook stared at the letter in dismay. And then he looked up and saw Stella, trembling, fearful. Suddenly he saw a way out.

"Stella!" he said. "I've behaved like a beast to you, my dear! I can see it now! Would you marry me tonight?"

She could not speak; she could only throw herself in his arms.

He rushed out. And in a little while Stella took the telephone, and called for Mona and Mary. It was Mona who answered.

"Oh—yes—yes—he's going to marry me!" said Stella. "But I'm so afraid of what he'll say when he finds out—"

"He'll say nothing," said Mona. "Because I've written to him to explain it all, and to let him know that he's done the only thing that would reconcile him with his father, too. You wait, Stella—I believe he'll settle down, now and turn into a pretty decent sort of husband in spite of everything! And I know you're going to be a good!" Then she hung up.

"He may not stay reformed," said Mary to Mona. "I think he's a bad egg. But it was worth doing, anyhow. We collected some of our bill—and we've made that little girl happy! That was worth doing, Mona!"



Mona and Holbrook at the Gaming Table.



Mona and Mary Avert a Threatened Suicide.